

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE-TIMES, Sunday, January 5, 1986 5-G

A few impressions of M.V. Regent Seas

By ETHEL BLUM

Q. Please tell me about the M.V. Regent Seas which sails from Montego Bay, Jamaica. We saw an ad and booked a cruise but we can't get much information. How old is the ship? Has it passed U.S. Coast Guard inspection? The only facts I have been able to get are that it is 22,000 tons and registered in Panama.

A. I sailed the vessel on a two-night, pre-inaugural cruise last month. Here are the facts and a few of my impressions.

The vessel was originally built for the Swedish American Line as the Gripsholm in 1956 and inaugurated trans-Atlantic service in May 1957. At the time, she had 214 first-class and 628 tourist-class cabins. She was sold to Karageorgis Cruises in 1975, renamed Navarino, and refitted for Mediterranean and South African service. During this conversion process, cabins were enlarged and the number of cabins reduced so a maximum of 756 passengers sailed in 294 outside cabins.

The ship was known for her beautiful woods and gracious European ambience. The Navarino was severely damaged in an accident in 1982 while in drydock and was laid up until last year, when she was sold to a Greek company which leased the ship on a long-term arrangement to the newly formed, Regency Cruises, which promptly renamed her the M.V. Regent Seas.

More than \$13 million was spent to bring the vessel up to first-class standards. The ship, as you know, is 22,000 tons. She measures 620 feet in length and 83 feet across the beam. Built with turbine engines, she was ahead of her time, and is fuel-efficient, which makes it possible for her to cruise at close to 20 knots and maintain a tight schedule. She is fully stabilized, has four elevators, nine decks and 110 AC electricity. Renovations included engine work, a new electrical system, up-graded stabilizers, and refurbishing of the entire vessel. Much of the European charm has been retained. If I were forced to use a single word to describe the Regent Seas it would have to be "comfortable." There is nothing flashy about the decor. It is subdued and comfortable.

Cabins are larger than on most new cruise ships, but since it was originally a two-class ship, some

Total Traveler

cabins are quite small. The layout is somewhat like a jigsaw puzzle — every cabin fits into the adjacent cabin. This makes for some odd-shaped staterooms quite unlike the uniformity common on ships built during the last 20 years. Carpets have been replaced in public areas, furniture either replaced or freshened up, cabins upgraded with new curtains and bedspreads. A new health and fitness center complete with Jacuzzis as well as a computer learning center move the vessel graciously into the contemporary cruise scene.

Total cabin capacity on the newly introduced Regent Seas is 355, which includes 12 suites and 27 inside cabins. She has two beautiful dining rooms connected by an area that could serve as an additional small dining room. Food was surprisingly good for a first voyage and should harbor future rave notices in this department.

The ship excels in her winter itinerary. The Regent Seas sails from Montego Bay in Jamaica every Sunday with calls at Grand Cayman, Cartagena and Aruba highlighted by a partial transit of the Panama Canal. She sails through the locks to Gatun Lake before returning to the Atlantic. The itinerary is proving so popular that the first four voyages were fully booked long before anyone had a chance to see the ship. Summers will find the Regent Seas sailing on alternate Saturdays from Vancouver and Anchorage.

The Regent Seas will be inspected by the U.S. Coast Guard before she ever leaves a U.S. port, which means before she begins her Alaska schedule. Meanwhile, company president William Shantz tells me the ship has been converted to meet all of the U.S. requirements as well as international safety standards. He also tells me the galley has been rebuilt to conform with U.S. Department of Health standards and also will probably be inspected by those authorities when the ship moves into the summer schedule.

On a personal note, I found the Regent Seas a comfortable vessel in every category.

© Travel Syndications